ANTI-THESPIS.

[Price ONE SHILLING and SIX-PENCE.]

ANTI-THESPIS:

OR A

VINDICATION

OF THE

Principal Performances at DRURY-LANE THEATRE

FROM THE

False Criticisms, Illiberal Abuse, and Gross Misrepresentations

of the Author of a POEM lately published, entitled, THESPIS.

[Price One Shilling and Six-pence.] Hor.

Players are the Abstract and brief Chronicles of the Times. You had better have a bad Epitaph when you are dead, than their ill Word while you are living SHAKESPEAR.

LONDON:

Printed for H. GARDNER, opposite St. Clement's Church, in the Strand; J. WALTER, at Charing-Cross; and S. BLADON, in Pater-noster-Row.

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January 16th

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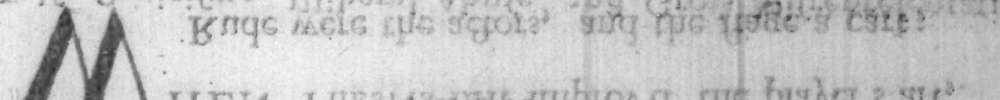

WHEN Thesis hath form'd the brave, and made Kinds weep the sclote, and the trade a cese?
Exile Criticism, Hilpert name, and Crose write Encyclopedias
Or, cry coxcomb within of the age?
Hath Thesis no notes, about the passage, in the sand?
And aims his knife at each Encyclopedist?
An alpha path pretends his step to tread?

And like Rome's bonds, for his balls renown'd
Each sclote's reputation bent to kill.
Chancellor Dunwealth-like, felt them the dull.
When Critic flail, no, thunder tore the pen.
So should it be in true examination, candid, THESIS.

ANTI-THESPIS.

WHEN THESPIS firſt improv'd the player's art,
Rude were the actors, and the ſtage a cart;
So ſhould it be in theſe cenſorious days,
When Critics blaſt, tho' thunder ſpares the bays.
CHURCHILL, Drawcanſir-like, firſt drew the quill,
Each actor's reputation bent to kill;
And like Rome's pontiff, for his bulls renown'd,
Anathemas with fury dealt around.
An upſtart bard preſumes his ſteps to tread,
And aims his ſhafts at each performer's head;
Hard fate of actors! doom'd to bear the rage
Of ev'ry coxcomb witling of the age!

But not to players is this bard alone
Severe; he damns all judgments but his own;
And in the groſs audaciouſly runs down
That judge without appeal men call the Town;
Aloud its praiſes infamous declares,
Cenſuring at once the audience and the players;
And *modeſtly* aſſerts no other eye
Is keen enough our Roscius' worth to ſpy.
But Garrick's merit we'll unrival'd own;
The ſock and buſkin he can grace alone:
From faults howe'er not even Garrick's clear,
Tho' faults like ſpots which in the ſun appear.
Say, does our Critic-bard his judgment ſhew,
In pointing out this actor's faults to view?
When Lear is with conflicting paſſions torn,
Whoſe wild exceſs no longer can be born,
When the dire mental ſtorm is at its height,
With judgment then the player ſhuns our ſight;
For in Art's exhibitions to the mind,
Some ſtrokes ſhould by ſpectators be divin'd;
And little ſkill does that performer ſhew,
Who ſtrains his powers as high as they can go.

Not ſo the mimic art fam'd SHAKESPEAR taught,
(SHAKESPEAR with Nature's choiceſt precepts fraught!)
In Paſſion's ſtorm and whirl-wind he requires
Actors ſhould ever temper nature's fires,
And not yield up the motions of the ſoul
To Paſſion's tyranny without controul.

In ſome things with our Critic we agree,
Nor ſtage nor town have juſtice done to LEE;
But malice ever in his ſoul prevails,
He praiſes LEE, and at poor PACKER rails.
Hapleſs the player who with critic rage,
Fierce and blood-thirſty, happens to engage;
Not arm'd Rhynoceros nor Hyrcanian boar
By trembling mortals ſhould be dreaded more.
Like ZOILUS, in ſpleen and burning ſpight
This modern THESPIS takes ſupreme delight;
And whilſt againſt his nature he commends,
With honied praiſe ſtill Cenſure's poiſon blends.
In elocution, an eſſential part
Of oratory's great, perſuaſive art,

That

That LEE is quite defective, he maintains,
And that he tires the ear with languid ſtrains,
Our Critic ſure is wrong, if this the caſe,
When next to GARRICK he gives LEE a place.
In elocution's powerful art alone,
The player's chiefeſt excellence is ſhewn.
Voice, by the harmony of ſounds combin'd,
Can touch, can rouſe, and elevate the mind;
Whilſt varied paſſions in tones juſt and clear,
Thrill thro' the ſoul, and captivate the ear.
In ſpeaking then the man muſt ſure excel,
Who juſtly claims the praiſe of acting well.
That art perſuaſive, oh much injur'd LEE!
Is thine, but not in its ſupreme degree.

HOLLAND, tho' long a favourite of the Town,
This ruthleſs bard next labours to pull down;
Declares by copying he can pleaſe alone,
But has no worth or genius of his own;
That by him nought original's diſplay'd,
GARRICK the body, HOLLAND but the ſhade.

This is a grievous fault, if this be true,
But let's do each performer juſtice due.
In imitators ſtill ſome merit lies,
Like rain-bows form'd by art they ſtrike the eyes;
They admiration never ſhould expect,
'Tis theirs reflections only to reflect:
But Sol to imitate ſome merit ſeems,
In borrow'd luſtre and deluſive beams.
However, HOLLAND's merit is not ſhewn
In copying GARRICK's excellence alone;
Each geſture and each tone in Manly's part,
Pleaſe us without the aid of mimic art;
And in perfection he is ſeen to riſe,
When on his native bent he moſt relies:
Not even GARRICK could more art diſplay
In following where Nature points the way.
Alike in Merope this player ſhines,
And princely eaſe with dignity combines.
How does he fill the audience with ſurpriſe,
When, tho' unarm'd, a tyrant he defies?
Even GARRICK's ſelf ſpectators ſtill confeſs,
Ne'er hit the true ſublime with more ſucceſs.

In Pyrrhus, where RACINE, with powerful art,
Paints all the ſtruggles of the human heart,
Thoſe ſtruggles which the powers of nature rend,
When love and duty in one ſoul contend,
Envy herſelf muſt HOLLAND's merit own;
HOLLAND, untaught, in Pyrrhus ſhines alone.
Fierce and invincible, altho' in chains,
Whilſt haughty Bajazet his pride maintains,
HOLLAND's performance is as juſt as new;
He acts the ſultan as the poet drew.
In Pierre he equal talents has diſplay'd,
Nor ſtoop'd to imitation's humble aid.

See the fierce Critic next at POWELL ſtrike,
Hint at defects, and heſitate diſlike;
POWELL, who, next to GARRICK in renown,
Meets warm applauſe from an admiring town.
With ſome few lines, and talents weak endow'd,
He by cenſorious THESPIS is allow'd.
'Tis granted POWELL in thoſe parts can charm,
Where wretchedneſs and age our fears alarm;
Yet POWELL often in Lothario draws
From the judicious auditor applauſe;

And ſtill th' attention of the houſe commands,
In Townly, when he ſagely reprimands.
No ſcrapes or cringes are from POWELL ſeen,
Paltry expedients, little arts, and mean;
He ne'er of ſenſe and judgment drew the ſcorn,
By GARRICK's ſelf declar'd a player born;
By nature fram'd the public to engage,
And be the pride and honour of the ſtage.
But merit ſcreens not from the Critic's ſpight,
To carp at worth is ſtill his vile delight.

To judge of CAUTHERLY and BENSLY's claim
To reputation and an actor's name,
Our Critic-bard ſeverely next declines,
And thus both players to neglect conſigns.

Forc'd, he to YATES's merit gives its due,
But ſays he ever fails when parts are new.
This cenſure ſurely muſt be thought moſt hard,
The fault not in the player, but the bard;
For modern bards oft write in ſuch a ſtrain,
Actors to find their meaning ſtrive in vain.

In KING he calls defect what others praiſe:
KING ſurely nor from truth nor nature ſtrays,
When, to do juſtice to the well-bred ſmart,
In acting pertneſs, he exerts his art;
And in Count Baſſet ſurely he ſhould ſhew
The ſaucy ſmatter of the would-be beau.

Shame to the Muſes! VERNON he diſclaims,
Becauſe as actor at applauſe he aims.
Powerful by Muſic to enchant the breaſt,
And ſooth the ruthleſs ſavage to his reſt,
Such talents ſure ſhould Cenſure's voice controul:
The Critic has no muſic in his ſoul!
He's fit for treaſon, ſtratagem, and ſpoil,
For this he labours by the mid-night oil.
Who ſhines in ſong, to elocution's art
Divineſt energy muſt ſure impart.

On uſeful PALMER next he vents his rage,
PALMER, the prop of a declining ſtage.
Altho' by playing almoſt ev'ry night,
He ſtill renews and varies our delight,

He

He thinks, that ſearch the Theatres around,
An odder compound never can be found.
Yet PALMER is a favourite of the pit,
For various parts no actor e'er more fit;
By nature is his perſon form'd to pleaſe,
In parts which aſk both dignity and eaſe:
But captious THESPIS his deportment blames,
Againſt his action furiouſly exclaims.
By burning ſpight to contradiction led,
Our Critic ſays, he's awkward tho' well-bred:
His tones he grants articulate and clear,
But adds, he wounds with diſſonance the ear;
And in young Oakly's part ſo ſtrangely howls,
He makes night hideous, and alarms the owls.
Next in Sir Brilliant, PALMER he arraigns,
Horrid and nice at once declares his ſtrains.
Moſt horrid nice muſt ſeem the critic ear,
Since fram'd ſuch ſounds prepoſterous to hear.
How inconſiſtent muſt that rage be thought,
Which in one man diſcovers every fault,
Yet in next line allows he ſcorns the aid
Of deſpicable arts ſo oft diſplay'd;

Is ever maſter of his author's aim,
Juſt to his ſenſe, and cautious of his fame.
The critic's pen when whims capricious guide,
What player's merit can the teſt abide?

If ſenſe profound, with latitude of mind,
A quick conception, and true taſte combin'd;
If thorough knowledge of each nicer art,
Each ſcene of life, each corner of the heart;
From cenſure could ſecure an actor's name,
Or gain admiſſion to the ſhrine of Fame;
Conſtant applauſe LOVE ſurely might engage,
But merit's no defence from critic rage:
Nor trueſt taſte nor judgment can defend
Actors from thoſe whom wit and parts offend.
Tho' LOVE in Falſtaff's own'd by all to ſhine,
THESPIS would LOVE to infamy conſign.
He owns this player tops the part of Bayes,
But ſoon retracts the half-extorted praiſe;
In Comedy his genius leſs avails,
Becauſe in Tragedy he ſometimes fails;
And for Alphonſo's or for Gloſter's fault;
Falſtaff himſelf is into judgment brought;

For critics deal in calumny al one;
With them no beauties for defects atone.
The candid HORACE otherwiſe directs:
Beauties, he ſays, ſhould palliate all defects;
Since works moſt perfect are not free from flaws,
Candour a veil o'er imperfections draws.

That BADDELEY in a foreign footman's part
Diſplays the niceſt touches of his art;
That he unites their abjectneſs and pride,
E'en furious THESPIS' ſelf has not deny'd.
The cauſtic Critic owns his talents here,
But cenſures BADDELEY when he quits that ſphere.
Yet ſure ambition ſhould not be confin'd;
Why to one walk ſhould actors be conſign'd?
KING ſhines in epilogues, but not alone;
There BADDELEY too ſome excellence has ſhewn.

At hapleſs DODD our bard next pours his rage,
DODD, fram'd at birth a coxcomb for the ſtage.
Cibber, who play'd ſuch parts in times of yore,
In Foplings never pleas'd an audience more.

The foremoſt fribble of the age he ſhines,
His action the affected beau refines;
In Faddle Dodd with energy of art
Joins the fop's figure to the villain's heart;
He points our laughter, loudeſt mirth excites,
And whilſt he gratifies our ſpleen delights,
In Wildair if leſs excellence he ſhews,
Than acting coxcombs and affected beaus,
Such merit ſhould for blemiſhes atone,
None to unite perfections e'er were known;
Few to excel in many walks are found,
With double wreaths are few performers crown'd.

That Weston to delight the age was born,
Our Critic owns, yet Weston treats with ſcorn;
Declares this player oft from nature ſtrays,
Seduc'd and tempted by the thirſt of praiſe;
Attempts to joke when jokes are out of place,
And ſtrives to ſoar by pertneſs and grimace.
What but a critic's microſcopic eye
Could e'er in Weston ſuch defects eſpy?
But critic eyes are fond defects to find,
Whilſt to the greateſt beauties they are blind.

HAVARD of memory and plain ſenſe poſſeſt,
Ev'n by outrageous THESPIS is confeſs'd;
Such requiſites, howe'er, are damn'd as low;
On HAVARD lifeleſs plaudits we beſtow;
Memory and ſenſe the beſt of judges prize,
But critics ſuch eſſentials weak deſpiſe.

With talents for life's ancient ſcenes endow'd,
HURST muſt be cenſur'd next for ſpeaking loud.
'Tis eaſy to offend a critic's ear,
Defects they ſee, harſh diſſonance they hear:
Thus men infected with the jaundice view
All objects tinctur'd with a yellow hue.

Obſcurity poor MOODY cannot ſave,
Who makes exaſperated THESPIS rave;
From cenſure free even MOODY cannot paſs,
Branded with marble heart and front of braſs;
But who with MOODY in a Teague can vie?
Who dares his eminence in Teague deny?
Tho' forc'd to praiſe, the Critic loudly rails,
Malice ſo ſtrongly o'er his heart prevails.

ACKMAN alone of all inferior players,
The Critic's unrelenting fury ſpares;
ACKMAN eſcapes him in a lucky hour,
He ſpares ----- to ſhew his arbitrary power.

In clowniſh, ſimple characters alone,
Our Critic PARSONS' merit deigns to own,
And warns him, as againſt ſome heinous crime,
Never to aim at characters ſublime.
BRANSBY the Critic damns with praiſes faint,
But why of BRANSBY ſhould he make complaint?
Who humbly careful through his various rounds,
To ſcape from cenſure his ambition bounds.
In ſtile prophetic AICKIN he declares,
May rank one day with ſerviceable players,
But never lay to reputation claim,
Or place acquire amongſt the ſons of Fame.
Hard ſentence this! but no appeal there lies,
When critics thus by prophecy ſurprize.
At ill-ſtarr'd BURTON next his dirt he flings,
BURTON he ranks with thoſe unnotic'd things,

But

As kings or lords, who nightly tread the ſtage,
Yet have no power attention to engage.
THESPIS his memory owns, extols his pains,
But ſays, that nature has refus'd him brains.
Abuſe in torrents critics ever pour,
When envy, rancour, ſpleen, their tempers ſour.

Againſt the men thus furious THESPIS rails,
Then with like rage the female bands aſſails.
No power has harmony to charm his ſpight,
With malice he at VINCENT rails, and WRIGHT;
Sure he is curs'd with an unfeeling heart,
To whom ſweet ſounds no tenderneſs impart;
Who melody's divineſt ſtrains can hear
With mind unmov'd, and undelighted ear.
'Tis ſtrange that BADDELEY, for harmonious ſkill
Renown'd, ſhould 'ſcape the furious Critic's quill:
Whoſe talents may from Envy force a ſigh,
And ſpread red anguiſh o'er her madd'ning eye:
Merit ſo much excites the Critic's hate,
If he admires her, ſure her worth is great.

But

But Reynolds without mercy he arraigns;
Her faults and merits equal he maintains;
Obliquely cenſures her whilſt he commends,
Says ſhe at once both pleaſes and offends;
Rails at her perſon, not regarding truth,
As deſtitute of life, tho' warm with youth,
For critics take ſuch pleaſure to revile,
Groſs contradictions they can reconcile.
He owns that Barry's varied tones impart
The livelieſt ſenſe of pleaſure to the heart;
But in the following line this praiſe deſtroys,
" To fame, he cries, weak title is a voice."
Hopkins indeed finds favour in his ſight,
Prone to be wrong, ſometimes he judges right;
'Tis true, by few performers ſhe's ſurpaſt,
And ruſhes on to public favour faſt.

Clive, ſtill the favourite of the comic Muſe,
With baſeſt virulence the bard purſues;
Clive, who in loweſt characters can charm,
Whoſe genius ſhould the cenſurer's rage diſarm.

Say, in the humble character of Nell,
Does ſhe not with ſuperior art excel?
In Lady Wiſhfort, amorous tho' in years,
Unrivall'd and conſummate ſhe appears;
Whilſt with love's flame in hoary age ſhe glows,
Vice in its full deformity ſhe ſhews:
In fine, no player e'er poſſeſt more art
To hit the real humour of each part;
Like CLIVE none e'er could nature's force diſplay,
Her genius ſhines reſplendent in decay;
But genius to defend no worth avails,
When rancour in a critic's heart prevails.

On POPE with equal fury next he falls;
Whom for her coarſe vulgarity he mawls;
Tho' to be vulgar in a low-life part,
Is the perfection of the player's art;
Since in ſuch characters, external grace
And all politeneſs would be out of place.
THESPIS to ABINGTON ſome favour ſhews,
But he retracts his praiſes in the cloſe;
Reſolv'd her talents not to over-rate,
He owns them ſtrong and various, but not great.

PRITCHARD, who ſhines the wonder of the age,
Might well indeed eſcape the critic's rage;
PRITCHARD, who in the ſprightly comic ſhines,
And adds new energy to tragic lines:
Even THESPIS' rage is by ſuch worth control'd;
But then he whiſpers that ſhe's growing old.

Of equal charms and talents YATES poſſeſt,
Can ſoften the fierce critic's flinty breaſt.
In tragedy and comedy alike,
This perfect actreſs can with wonder ſtrike;
And in her perſon are ſuch charms diſplay'd,
She'd pleaſe us, deſtitute of genius' aid.
Yet high as hypercritic THESPIS rates
The well-known worth and excellence of YATES,
He cannot give perfection to her ſhare,
But where's the man e'er ſaw a perfect player?
Tho' oft performers yield us high delight,
None ever yet attain'd perfection's height.

THESPIS, preſumptuous! boaſts that he has try'd
With care to judge, and candor to decide.

Curſe

Curſe on ſuch candor and pretended care,
Which e'en the beſt performers cannot ſpare.
Highly would it reflect upon the times,
Should favour ſhine on ſuch malignant rhymes.
He threatens likewiſe to purſue his aim,
And Covent-Garden trembles at his name.
Should THESPIS thus protract th' invenom'd page,
WOODWARD himſelf ſhall ſcarce eſcape his rage.
All whom he cenſures boldly he defies,
Unerring in his own diſcerning eyes:
Whate'er complaints his boldneſs may excite,
He'll ſcribble on, inſpir'd by burning ſpight;
Tread in the path which DENNIS trod before,
Againſt the Theatre with fury roar;
With Gallery, Pit, and Boxes, war declare,
And prone to damning, not one actor ſpare.
On Candor Merit then muſt loudly call,
To bring an antidote againſt ſuch gall;
Whilſt critic rage let looſe thus deſperate raves,
And no perfection from its fury ſaves.

FINIS.

FINIS.